

NO 'CARMEN' TO SUCCEED CALVE

THE METROPOLITAN CAN ONLY ENVY ITS RIVAL.

Hammerstein Has Spanish Heroines in Plenty, but at the Broadway House the Popular French Opera Has Not Been Sung This Season—The Failures.

It will astonish the cities of Europe to learn that the most costly and most extravagant opera house in the world has not been able to give a performance of an opera which is certain to appear on the bills of probably every other opera house in the world some time in the present year. "Carmen" is one of the most popular works given in any country. It holds a record close to the most frequently sung of the Wagner operas in Germany, while even England has recognized its beauty and listens to it in French and Italian at Covent Garden and then in English occasionally. Zélie de Lussan, who is to sing *Carmen* during the coming season at Covent Garden, has become almost as much of an institution in that work as Emma Albani is in the annual holiday performances of "The Messiah." Italy, of course, hears the opera less frequently as its system of making special productions every year instead of having a regular repertoire interferes with the revival of such classics. In France the opera shares the national veneration and appreciation shown to "Faust," while Russia so loves Bizet's score that it enjoyed Maria Gay in the title rôle almost as much as Boston does. The most successful production of the Boston season of opera has been "Carmen," with Maria Gay in the title rôle. The Athens of the Charles cannot get enough of Maria Gay in the opera. Children cry for her and Brookline refuses to be comforted. From distant Nahant and Winthrop crowds march to the matinees and all Boston loves Maria. It was this identical Maria, by the way, who gave the opera its coup de grâce in New York last winter at the Metropolitan Opera House.

When she was engaged to come here with all her European fame in the rôle it was thought that there might be a renaissance of interest in the work which had languished at the Broadway opera house since Emma Calvé transferred her interpretation to the other opera shop further down town. Arturo Toscanini exercised his magic in the orchestra pit, Enrico Caruso added all his vogue to the part of Don José, while Geraldine Farrar became for the occasion an altogether lovely *Michèle* worthy the traditions of the house which had offered Emma Eames, Nellie Melba, Aino Ackté and other famous singers in that especially singerproof part. In spite of this uncommon cast New York once more sniffed at the best "Carmen" that the Metropolitan had to offer. The possession of Bizet's opera seemed more than ever vested in the Manhattan. But it was not until this year that the older opera house threw up its hands as if to say there was no use struggling against the manager who discovered

city. In that same first season Emma Calvé came over to sing a few performances, probably to annoy the management of the Metropolitan Opera House more than for the sake of the few thousand dollars she earned. But the glory of that

first season at the Manhattan and eleven during her second, which is a record almost equal to that of Mme. Calvé when her star was at its zenith. It was this very star that turned out to be baleful for the Metropolitan the minute



JEANNE GERVILLE-REACHE.

Carmen had passed and there was no loss of admiration for the gentle Clotilde Bressler-Gianoli in the comparison of the two representations.

The younger Frenchwoman was not altogether an unknown quantity when she came to Thirty-fourth street. With an adventurous French company she had wandered up from New Orleans to sing here at the Casino and shown in

that Emma Calvé was no more its *Carmen*. Audiences who enjoyed that exquisite and brilliant impersonation at the outset of her career in this country refused to be satisfied with anything that fell too far below that incomparable achievement. No other heroine of the Bizet opera had ever presented a performance so rich in poetic and beauty and so poetically tropical and imaginative. When



GERALDINE FARRAR AS MICHAELA.

those persons who thought that the rôle would prove unsuited to her northern temperament. There was thus a second *Carmen* to pass before a Metropolitan audience without gaining its approval or enough of its approval to be of profit to the manager or a source of pride to the artist. The representations of "Carmen" in which Mme. Fremstad was engaged had the best resources in the company to make them brilliant, for both Signor Caruso and Mme. Ackté took part in them. But there was another *Carmen* in the minds of the public in the person of Mme. Calvé and they refused to be comforted. From that time until the advent of the temperamental Maria Gay there was no more effort made to wrest the *Carmen* championship from the daring hands of Oscar Hammerstein, who still holds them tightly. It was characteristic of his failures with the opera that during the five seasons of Heinrich Conried's company Bizet's opera was sung only eleven times. Four of these performances had Emma Calvé in the title rôle and one was interrupted by the accident to the bridge in the first act in which several of the chorus singers were hurt. That night Anna Arnaud of the opera school had taken the title rôle to supplant the singer announced.

Although the Metropolitan has had its trouble in its attempt to find a woman who could sing *Carmen* to the satisfaction of its audiences there has never been any trouble of this kind at the Manhattan. Mr. Hammerstein has shaken *Carmen* out of his sleeve with the arrival of every season, and it is a dull year that does not yield a new one for his theatre. That Mme. Bressler-Gianoli had not spoiled her public for any successors their efforts have shown. None of them has ever been vocally such an interpreter of this part as Olive Fremstad, although nearly all of them have possessed greater natural qualifications for the character. It was Marguerite Sylva who this year showed to delighted audiences at the Manhattan that it was still possible to find *Carmen* capable of upholding almost the highest dramatic traditions of the rôle. Before Mr. Hammerstein and that mezzo-soprano had parted company with the abruptness sometimes characteristic of the severings of his relations with his songsters there had been divulged another *Carmen* in the person of Lina Cavalieri, who may be counted on to satisfy the eye, whatever else she may do. Mme. Cavalieri made a most charmingly naive gypsy of the Bizet-Merimee brand and was added to the list that includes the intensely dramatic Jeanne Gerville-Reache, who looks as if she might be led by her natural instincts to emphasize into ragtime the syncopations of the Bizet score. Marietta Mazarin, who had not the association of the other foremost artists of the Hammerstein company because they were on tour for the benefit of provincial towns, proved a tragic and dramatic gypsy who might have been a distinguished portrait in the Manhattan's gallery had she been allowed to appear under more favorable circumstances. There has not been one of these

Carmen who has not met with success in spite of the fact that they have nearly all borne much less distinguished operatic names than their associates at the Metropolitan.

This year there are several *Carmen*s in the company at the Metropolitan, but there is no disposition on the part of the management to tempt fate with any more exponents of that character. There is, for instance, Mme. Delna, who is with Mme. Calvé the greatest French *Carmen* of the day. Then there is Jane Noria, the American soprano, who has repeatedly appeared in the part here and abroad, and then Olivia Fremstad is still here with no other change than might be expected from transforming Olive into

Olivia. Mme. Homer would undoubtedly be delighted to sing *Carmen*, while the rôle has proved one of the most important in the career of Emmy Destinn. It was the part that first brought her into notice in Berlin and for several seasons she has sung it there. Why Miss Destinn does not show what she can do in the rôle is almost as mysterious as the reason why

in other tongues. Lilli Lehman, who had always been considered the tragic *Carmen* that, by the way, she made her first appearance in this country as *Carmen* with a Don José in Max Alvary, who was just as German but just as popular at that time. Basta Tavarly long after the end of the German régime



AUGUSTA DORIA.

went on in a hurry one night to save a performance and she was in German during the Albany Grand administration. There had been a French *Carmen* until Emma Calvé tried some other language. Even Giovanni Zenatello did not hesitate to sing the music of Don José in that magnificent Tuscanese a few weeks ago at the Manhattan when Lina Cavalieri made her first appearance as *Carmen*. The French performance of "Carmen" made the more it is likely to be in demand since the obstruction of ill-favored French is very likely to jar on persons who are exigent in the matter of "Carmen" is performed, and that is likely to be all New York now.

The list of *Carmen*s at the Metropolitan Opera House has been very small when you consider the number of the operatic performances there. Antoinette Brown was no longer young when she came here to sing a part in which she had been known in Europe, and there had been performances of the work during the Manhattan season; for even in these days of devotion to German standards it is readily perceived that "Carmen" was one of the operas well suited to their language, nor to German singers. In the number of its representations every year in Germany, where it is almost as popular as it is in France. It was practically Mme. Calvé who began the popularity of the work at the Metropolitan. Since that time it has been possible to count on the fingers the performances of the work.

It used to be Maurice Grau's theory that combinations and not single stars were the basis of operatic fortune, and in this day no better principle has ever been found. A popular soprano and a popular tenor are sure to bring about the largest outpouring that delights the impresario's heart. There was always proof of this to be found in the size of the audiences when Jean de Reszko sang alone or with another of the beloved stars. It always took two to bring the attendance up to the water mark. That was not true in the case of "Carmen," however. If Mme. Calvé were to be the heroine nobody would draw an audience large enough to be an exception to the rule that combinations are the strongest appeal to the public.



FRITZI SCHEFF.

a *Carmen* or two a winter and delighted his audiences with them. Just what Clotilde Bressler-Gianoli, who is just now enjoying in Europe the same success she knew here, did for the first season at the Manhattan Opera House is now a matter of operatic history in this

her one representation a remarkable interpretation of the rôle from a dramatic standpoint, combined with an immense allotment of vocal baggage as ever carried a singer along the road to fame. The fact remains that the Frenchwoman sang the rôle fifteen times during her

the wilful French soprano had one of her periodic rows with Maurice Grau, whom she never seemed able to forgive for making her rich, he tried to find somebody to replace her in the affections of the public. His choice naturally fell on Zélie de Lussan, whom London had adored as *Carmen*, and she came here to try to take the place of the beloved Emma Calvé. In spite of Jean de Reszko and Nellie Melba in the support at her first appearance in the rôle at the Metropolitan Opera House there was no success in the attempt to revive the sensational interest in Bizet's opera. It was the singer, not the work, that the New York public had learned to love.

So the first *Carmen* to supersede her failed to satisfy audiences at the Metropolitan. Mme. Calvé continued to return every year or two during the consulship of Maurice Grau and even came to the Metropolitan when Heinrich Conried was its manager. Then, however, there was less of the old vocal and physical allure, and an oldish *Carmen* is very difficult to explain. Sirens must be young, even if operatic heroines of all kinds need not be. But the impression of that *Carmen* in its most fascinating estate had not been eliminated from the memory of its old admirers, as every subsequent attempt to revive the opera showed.

It always seemed an incongruous idea to associate Mme. Fremstad with the part of the Bizet gypsy. In spite of the rumors of her great success that travelled here from Cologne, Munich and other Teutonic centres of appreciation there seemed to be no reason for believing that this great Wagnerian and dramatic artist could be adapted to the rôle of *Carmen*. But the work is so popular when well given that it can with difficulty be dropped from the repertoire of an opera house. For that reason managers always seek to find a *Carmen* who shall please the public sufficiently to make the representations in some degree sensational. Andreas Dippel said the other day that any woman who sang the part exceptionally well was a valuable member of an opera house organization even if she should do little else. That is due to the great popularity of the work itself.

So Mme. Fremstad had her chance as *Carmen* and justified the opinion of



MARIA GAY.

Geraldine Farrar has not added it to her repertoire instead of contenting herself with the harmless but necessary *Michèle*. Certainly there is a rôle that should make a strong appeal to the American soprano's dramatic genius. But they have lost confidence in the Metropolitan *Carmen*s, and until Miss Destinn or Miss Farrar decides to sing the rôle it is not probable that there will be any representations of the Bizet work.

One effect of Mme. Calvé's great success in "Carmen" was as certain as the indelible impression she made on the public. Bizet's heroine ever since she was incarnated by the French soprano was of necessity to be heard only in the French language. The manager who in this day would attempt to interest the public in a representation of the opera in any other language would have a sorry time. There was an Italian performance at the Academy of Music last fall, and it was given in that language always in the past, Minnie Hauk having made her great fame in performances in that tongue, in which Giuseppe del Puente, the famous Escamillo, was in the cast and Italo Campanini the Don José. Nowadays "Carmen" must be French, for most of the New Yorkers who love their Bizet acquired that affection through the performances of the great Emma in the tongue of its librettist and composer. So if pretty Ester Ferrarini, who appeared in the part at the Academy last fall, had been many times prettier and cleverer than she was there would have been little chance for her success with exacting hearers until she had done the part in French.

Until Emma Calvé revealed the fact that no language is so well suited to the work as its native French there have been admired sopranos who tried the rôle



MARGUERITE SYLVA.



EMMY DESTINN.